



**DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY**

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Cl. No R3:QCSO43 H1

Ac No 41627

Date of issue for loan
2 JAN 1981

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below An overdue charge of 5 Paise will be collected for each day the book is kept overtime

Bedell **Lectures**
Delivered at Kenyon College
November 25 and 26, 1940

BEDELL LECTURES
DELIVERED AT KENYON COLLEGE

The Religious Function of Imagination

by

RICHARD KRONER

*Professor of Philosophy at McGill University
Visiting Lecturer at the Union Theological Seminary*

Published for Kenyon College

NEW HAVEN
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON • HUMPHREY MILFORD • OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1941

COPYRIGHT, 1941, BY YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form (except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

*To Henry Noble MacCracken
President of Vassar College
in gratitude*

We are, I believe, at the opening of an era of new greatness in the history of Christian thought because we are engaged in a profounder and bolder self-scrutiny than the modern Church has yet known.

W. E. HOCKING in *Living Religions and a World Faith*.

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
I. <i>Thought and Imagination</i>	i
II. <i>Imagination and Revelation</i>	35

PREFACE

It is with the greatest pleasure that I express my thanks to President Chalmers for the invitation to discuss the relations between Religion and Imagination in the Bedell Lectures at Kenyon College. In these lectures I have stated briefly what I had expounded more explicitly in my Gifford Lectures on "The Boundary-line between Philosophy and Religion," delivered two years ago at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

The inspiring atmosphere of Kenyon College, the friendliness of the colleagues there, and the eagerness of the students to advance their learning I shall never forget.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. F. B. Fitch, Professor of Philosophy at Yale University, who improved the English of my manuscript, and to the Acting Dean of Bexley Hall, the Divinity School of Kenyon College, Dr. C. C. Roach, as well as to the Reverend Kendrick Strong of Mount Desert Larger Parish who kindly helped me in revising the proofs.

Richard Kroner

*Seal Harbor
August 1941*

The Religious Function of Imagination

I

THOUGHT AND IMAGINATION

PHILosophy is a product of thought, religion a product of imagination. Many thinkers, among them Aristotle and Hegel, have therefore taught that philosophy is entitled to claim a higher right of expressing ultimate truth than religion, or that it is more able to say adequately what is the essence of things. According to this view religion veils the truth in symbolical images whereas philosophy grasps it without disguising it in any way. Thought, it is said, can penetrate into the substance of all things, it can discover what is really real in them and what appearance only, whereas religion is compelled, on account of its symbolical language, to dwell on images which are borrowed from the realm of mere appearance. Religion therefore does not reach to the ultimate essence and truth or at least not in the appropriate form of thought and conception; it

The Religious Function of Imagination

does not abandon the sphere of appearances as perfectly and thoroughly as philosophy does.

I will try to show that this verdict is not justified, that on the contrary the greater veracity is on the side of religion; that religion more than philosophy, and certainly more than science, is able to penetrate to ultimate truth and reality. In other words, I will try to show that imagination is superior to thought with regard to the deepest questions of human life and existence. And I should add: the deepest questions that can ever be raised are those concerning man and God, and not those concerning things and processes in nature.

The deepest questions are the simplest questions: What is the meaning of man, of man's activity and destiny, of culture and history, of all our efforts and all our achievements? What is the ultimate meaning of our personal life, and what is the best way of living? What is the highest goal of mankind? What does death mean? These and similar

Thought and Imagination

questions are more important than merely theoretical problems, not only for our life, for the decisions to be made by ourselves, but also for our knowledge of the world at large, for our world view, and thus for our ultimate relationship to the real and even to nature and all things. It is religious imagination and not philosophic thought that gives the most satisfactory and the most profound answers to these questions. Religious imagination is, as it were, more akin to the ultimate essence of life and reality than are thought and speculation.

This statement probably sounds hard and unpleasant in an epoch which is as proud of the human intellect and of all intellectual performances as ours is. Nevertheless it must be maintained and emphasized, for it is the duty of philosophy to draw the boundary line between thought and imagination, that is, between philosophy and religion. Kant was the first in modern times to acknowledge the limits of speculative reason and thought. "I have found it necessary," he says in the pref-

The Religious Function of Imagination

ace to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith." The *Critique*, he adds, forever silences "all objections to morality and religion . . . , and this in Socratic fashion, namely, by the clearest proof of the ignorance of the objectors." But Kant has taken the first step only, he has not gone far enough. He still holds that reason is entitled to establish a "pure rational faith," because he did not fully appreciate the part which religious imagination takes.

What is the function of imagination in general? What does it contribute to the whole fabric of the human mind? At first sight it seems to have no relation to truth at all. It seems to be the very opposite of truth to the sober intellect which explores reality as it really is. Imagination overruns the solid facts of *objective* observation and rational argument. It has no respect for the results of experience. On the contrary it is the source of imaginary things and beings, of a world which exists only in our own mind, in our

Thought and Imagination

fancy, in fiction and poetry; it is the fountain source of a merely *subjective* world. Not logical necessity but illogical caprice, not definite rules but arbitrary invention dominate the realm of imagination. To be sure, there is a kind of imagination which has a relation to truth: it can be called *reproductive* imagination, recalling former impressions only, without any addition from the side of our own mind. But that is not imagination in the proper sense. Our memory preserves certain images of our former perceptions and experiences which imitate the formerly perceived and experienced things. Those images are not products of imagination; they are rather true remembrances. Imagination displays its peculiar power not by such imitative images but by creating new images or new connections of images; it is not reproductive but *productive*. It does not copy the world we have perceived and experienced but transforms this world; it generates a new world of its own. Thus it does not possess the value of objective knowledge in any way, it does not express objective truth.

The Religious Function of Imagination

This clear distinction between subjective imagination and objective knowledge, however, cannot be maintained when we reflect on the fact that our intellect, in striving after objective truth, cannot simply reproduce or copy what the senses perceive. Rather it has to subject the data of the senses to its own logical rules. In order to fulfill this task the intellect must possess a certain kind of activity or spontaneity. It has often been said therefore that even in the field of scientific investigation and discovery the part of imagination is not to be neglected. He who reads the *Critique of Pure Reason* for the first time will be surprised to learn that Kant introduces the faculty of productive imagination into the field of objective knowledge as a necessary link between sensation and understanding. Neither the senses alone nor understanding alone can build up a scientific system of nature; imagination must submit the material of sense perception to the notions of our understanding. Imagination has therefore an indispensable and irreplaceable function in

Thought and Imagination

the theoretical field of knowledge. The wall between productive imagination and objective truth is, you see, not insurmountable; on the contrary, truth even in the restricted sense of objective scientific truth needs the power of productive imagination for its discovery and establishment. The theoretical function of imagination consists in connecting the field of sensation with the intellectual sphere.

Besides the *theoretical* function of serving the purposes of scientific knowledge, imagination plays an important role in the realm of our *practical* life. There is no human impulse or appetite, no desire or inclination, no striving or struggling after an ideal that is not accompanied or led by an image of the end to be accomplished, however vague this image may be, or whatever meaning may be inherent in it. Images are the impelling forces in all our actions, images which contain our purposes and prospects, which represent the concrete life of our opinions, our convictions, our creeds and presumptions. Images are the

The Religious Function of Imagination

content of programs and platforms, the views and the ideals of schools, parties, groups, and so on, the watchwords and slogans of social, political, and spiritual movements or revolutions. Our inner life is determined by images, produced by practical imagination. These mental pictures, expressing not what is or happens but what is to be or to happen, are not concepts or notions, not thoughts in the theoretical sense of the word; they are not the result of scientific investigation and explanation, not principles or axioms for the sake of such investigation and explanation; rather they are images determining our practical, and that is our real, life. For our real life is not intellectual only; it is the life of our heart and our will as well. And the language of our heart and our will is the language of imagination, as every preacher and every orator knows. Imagination is the architect of our future world, the intrinsic motor of our private and public life. The trend of his imagination indicates the nature of a person, the height of his moral standards, the very worth

Thought and Imagination

of his character, the level of his spirit. A pure heart is proved in a pure imagination, a sublime mind in sublime images.

Has the practical function of imagination any relation to truth and reality, or is it perfectly whimsical and capricious? It is obvious that there is in any case a close relation between theoretical knowledge and practical activity, between our experience of the existing world and our actual purposes. The pragmatists have emphasized this relation and have based their concept of truth on it. "The payments true ideas bring are the sole why of our duty to follow them," says William James. But it is not this pragmatic connection on which we have now to reflect. We ask whether or not practical imagination as such has any bearing on truth and reality, whether the images which generate or represent our world view or our ideals, and which determine our practical conduct, can be right or wrong in themselves. I think we must answer these questions in the affirmative. We can live in illusions or we can live in the light of truth,

The Religious Function of Imagination

not only with respect to our knowledge of the objective world but also with respect to our practical or moral standards and patterns, our aims and ends. This is no longer a scientific truth, or a truth to be scientifically discovered. It is a practical truth, concerning our moral weal and woe, the direction of our will, the dealing with our life problems, the control of our passions and impulses, the right or wrong of our struggles, the worth of our character. And it is more. Our practical life hints at a goal which is connected with the meaning not only of our own life and the life of our fellow men, of our nation, or even of mankind, but with the meaning of the whole world, of all reality. We cannot find the right way in life, we cannot find the right goal of our will without the right outlook on the world at large. This fact is based on the peculiar nature of man. We can define man as the being that is aware of the world as a whole. Man is therefore a metaphysical or a religious being. He is religious not accidentally but essentially.

Thought and Imagination

Man has an access to the whole and is man thereby. Although he is not able to perceive the whole, or to seize it by means of scientific investigation, he is aware of it in another way. The whole is something beyond the boundary line of perception and science; it includes man as a willing and acting and feeling being, and is the sphere of our ideals and goals. Even if science could advance to the uttermost limits, it would never meet this sphere, and could never deal with it; and therefore it would never reach reality as a whole. The whole cannot be observed like the outside world of senses, because it is not this world alone. It cannot be experienced and ascertained by calculation like the movements of the stars or like chemical processes. Rather it must be interpreted like everything that is meaningful. There is no difference between ultimate reality and the ultimate meaning of reality, for reality is ultimate just because it comprises or embodies the ultimate meaning of the universe, and thus of our own existence and actual life.

The Religious Function of Imagination

Perhaps one might think that history could and should present the right interpretation of our life, since our life is embedded in the stream of historical development and receives its standards and ideals from tradition. But there is a gap between history and life. Like the natural sciences, history has the ideal of objective truth; it contemplates all actions and events with a neutral eye without that partiality and decision which are necessary for the acting man in life. Moreover history turns to the past only; it refers to ideals and values insofar as they have determined and formed former generations; it cannot advise what is to be done in the present, or what goals are to be pursued in the future. Life is history in the making, not as an object of contemplation but as an object of will and valuation. Life is history seen from within. The actual attitude to be chosen by the living man or the living nation can never be deduced from the past as it is mirrored in history, although of course tradition as manifested in present habits, customs, standards,

Thought and Imagination

and so on is an important factor in life.

History cannot be a substitute for life. It cannot provide life with the right ideals, it cannot present the right world view. Even tradition determines the present not by the way of historical contemplation but as a living image in the present mind, as an integral component of life that is active in actual imagination. Every present has to decide its own issues, whether as an individual or as a social group. The responsibility rests on the actual will and imagination, not on the historical resuscitation of the past. Actual *responsible imagination* is centered in the image of the whole, of the real, of the ultimate meaning of the world. This image is not a definition, not a notion or a concept; it is a living entity like all images of our mind, ever changing, sometimes clearer, sometimes duller, now approaching the level of distinct thought, now returning to the darker but more vigorous actuality of imagination, from which all thoughts and conceptions in the realm of speculative philosophy spring. Our

The Religious Function of Imagination

image of the whole is closely connected with our emotional reaction toward reality. This reaction is probably the primary cause of the special direction and activity of our imagination. Not only particular instances, events in our life, the behavior of other people and so on, arouse our emotions, or kindle passions in our heart; the whole of reality engenders our fear and hope, our love and our hate, our rapture or our dismay, our gratitude or our horror, and a thousand other feelings and affections. These sentiments stir our imagination, modify, enlarge, enrich it, and the images in turn provoke new emotional reactions. Thus the world of myths, legends, fairy tales, and so on is generated by our imagination. We call this kind of imagination *religious imagination*: it is the source of all religions.

Imagination, not thought, is permitted to enter the darkness of the divine mystery. The victory of Christianity over Greek philosophy was based on this fact. To be sure, even religious imagination cannot fathom the depth of the divine mystery; there is no adequate

Thought and Imagination

image of the whole. But religious imagination is more apt than thought to risk the march into the unknown sphere, for thought is only a fragment of the mind, whereas imagination embraces the totality of our existence. Imagination unifies the opposite poles of our mind, the pole of sensation and that of reason. Greek philosophy asked imagination for help in order to become equal to religion in the beginning of the Christian era. The result was gnosticism and other forms of religious philosophies or philosophical religions. Thought alone cannot rival religion, because imagination is an illegitimate source of thought but a legitimate source of religion. A rational religion which has no imaginative elements can never satisfy the genuine religious need.¹ Scholastic philosophy has called God the *ens*

1. Two problems arise in this connection which I have not discussed in the lectures: 1. What kind of imagination is the source of metaphysics? Is there a special kind of speculative imagination which is legitimate in the metaphysical realm?
2. Is there any kind of imagination which is stimulated or even generated by thought? Dante's or Milton's poems and much Romantic poetry suggest this possibility.

The Religious Function of Imagination

realissimum, i.e., the most real entity. We no longer distinguish different degrees of reality and therefore we do not use the scholastic term. But it made sense. The sphere of ultimate reality, as grasped and articulated by religious imagination, is indeed more concrete, and thus more real, than anything grasped by mere thought, more real indeed than anything merely perceived by the senses. Religious imagination concerns the whole of reality, therefore the whole of experience and thought, whereas thought, sensation, perception concern only abstract fragments of our consciousness.

Usually we call the thing that our senses perceive concrete and real, but this thing is always an element in the totality of our actual state of mind and apart from it is abstract and unreal; it is contained in the concrete consciousness of the world in which we live and in which we enjoy concrete feelings, wishes, emotions, purposes, and so on. The so-called real thing takes part in this whole, it has a definite meaning dependent on the

Thought and Imagination

meaning of the whole. We do not see or hear or feel the things around us with our senses only, nor do we perceive them with our intellect only; instead we relate them to the concrete aspect of the world and life, which can never become the object of objective knowledge or of philosophic thought but which is rather interwoven into the individual and personal totality of our feeling, willing, and thinking soul. This totality has an imaginative background or frame. Reality therefore in its full meaning is always imaginative; it can only be grasped by the help of imagination, for to grasp it includes interpretation of its meaning which cannot be accomplished without imagination. Our consciousness is always integrated by this imagination of the whole that embraces all things, all events, all changes, unifying one's own self with the self of everybody, joining man and nature by a secret bond. Every thing and every being belongs to this imaginative whole, it has its own full reality only insofar as it participates in the reality of this whole.

The Religious Function of Imagination

It is true, I can abstract my attention from the imaginative background of my experiences, I can forget that I live in the midst of a world which is mysterious as a whole though explicable in detail, I can isolate facts for the purpose of scientific observation and investigation, I can experience the voice of my conscience without relating it to the divine mystery, I can contemplate the starry heavens without feeling the sublime infinity, and I can face death without being aware of the tremendous riddle that it involves. But in all these cases I deprive the facts of their full meaning, and therefore of their full reality, I make the real partly unreal, I diminish the degree of reality which everything possesses insofar as it is included in the whole. This whole is a mystery, and can be grasped or experienced only as a mystery, and that means only by religious imagination. He who denies the mystery of the whole has lost the treasure of the human soul, his very humanity, the source of religious imagination and faith, and

Thought and Imagination

no scientific knowledge or philosophic insight can compensate for the loss.

The so-called real, i.e., the material world of senses, is nothing more than the arena or the stage on which man performs the drama of his life. The full, the ultimate meaning of this drama can be interpreted by virtue of the religious imagination only. It is the ubiquitous mystery of the real, its intimate connection with the actuality and individuality of our life, which makes imagination more adequate to it than thought. It is a virtue in a concept to be stable, definite, constant as to meaning. The price it has to pay for that constancy is rigidity and lifelessness, an abstract and unreal character. In spite of their sublimity and alleged reality the Ideas of Plato and his followers suffer from being without any real life and vitality. Hegel has tried to correct this deficiency and to attribute a kind of self-movement and life to the Idea. But such an attempt, magnificent as it is, remains doubtful and problematic, for it endangers

The Religious Function of Imagination

the validity and consistency of thought. And the same danger arises in Bergson's recent attempt to vitalize thought in his philosophy of *élan vital*. An image on the contrary is not obliged to keep any logical consistency; it can change its meaning, its character, its content without endangering its value. Indeed its value is most apparent when the image transforms itself, undergoing many metamorphoses. It is alive, vivid, an individual entity, an actor on our own stage. Yet at the same time the religious image equals thought in representing what is eternal and universal, the omnipresence of ultimate meaning and unchangeable truth.

From the standpoint of logic and thought it is a paradox, an antinomy, that our imagination is able to embrace these opposite sides of ultimate reality in one and the same act. But this paradox is characteristic of the religious function of imagination. There are no intolerable contradictions in religious imagination, because the very term contradiction belongs to the sphere of rational

Thought and Imagination

thought only, not to the sphere of images. Imagination is as contradictory as life itself. How many inconsistencies and impossibilities can be found in the mythological realm of pre-Christian religions and in Christianity as well! The devotee of Greek religion was not bewildered by the behavior of gods who act like mortal beings and are moved by human passions and motives, even while they are supposed to enjoy tranquil eternal life. And we are not shocked to read that God feels like a human father toward his people although we know that He is almighty and foresees everything that happens. We are not confused by praying to God, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done . . .," although we know that God's will cannot be checked by any other power, and that our prayer therefore is in a logical sense unnecessary and even absurd. The religious function of imagination is not theoretical, nor is it practical; it is a specific function which is concerned with the self-contradictory essence of ultimate reality. Religious imagination can bring together

The Religious Function of Imagination

what is separated and must be separated by rational thought and logical knowledge. And it can separate what thought and knowledge are obliged to connect forever. Religious imagination thus can conceive and generate the world of miracles and prodigies, of legendary and mythical stories.

It is the general function of imagination to mediate between the opposite spheres of senses and intellect. It is the special function of religious imagination to mediate between the world of appearances and ultimate truth, reality, meaning. Bringing together both realms, imagination becomes contradictory, measured by the rules of thought. It is a paradox to call God father, for to be a father is a specific human possibility, based on the natural and ethical peculiarity of man. On the other hand this very paradox fulfills the function of religious imagination, binding together the visible realm of the human father and the invisible idea of the Supreme Being, thus elevating and exalting the world of appearance, and at the same time imaging and

Thought and Imagination

embodying that which surpasses every kind of body. The religious function of imagination therefore performs a task which cannot be performed by other means. It generates a sphere which is both sensuous like the phenomenal world in space and time, and super-sensuous like the intellectual world of concepts and notions, yet is neither phenomenal nor conceptual, avoiding the one-sided character of both extremes. Religious belief is devotion to the images of religious imagination, or more precisely, to the divine mystery as imaged by faith. It is the attitude of the person as a totality, not merely as an isolated intellect. Therefore it contains all the different elements of life, the life of the will, of the heart, and of the thinking mind as well, all of them gathered in the center of religious imagination.

Cardinal Newman, who had a fine feeling for the significance of imagination in the religious attitude, confines the character of religious belief, strangely enough, to an act of "assent." An assent, he says, is "the absolute

The Religious Function of Imagination

acceptance of a proposition without any condition.”² He distinguishes two different kinds of propositions, real and notional ones, and accordingly two kinds of assent. The religious assent is a real one, because it accepts the truth not of a notional relation but of a proposition which “is apprehended as experience and image, that is, which stands for things.”³ He sees and acknowledges the imaginative character of the content of religious belief, but in spite of this insight he emphasizes the intellectual act of the assent to a proposition. This is because Newman speaks primarily as a theologian and not as a simple believer. He therefore makes *dogma* rather than *image* the appropriate content of belief.

Dogma is a peculiar transformation of the image into a notion; it substitutes thought for imagination. It is true, and Newman has brought it home to us, that dogma is not notional like a scientific or philosophic thesis or theory, but rather preserves the nature of the

2. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, chap. ii, pt. i.
3. Chap. iv.

Thought and Imagination

previous image from which it springs; yet on the other hand, it deprives the image of its original vitality and hold on life, of its changeability and indefiniteness, and makes it approach the stability and constancy of philosophic concepts, emphasizing the supersensuous and universal meaning, and suppressing the imaginative individuality and reality. Accordingly Newman overrates the elements of intellectual assent, and underrates the other essential sides of religious life, namely the elements of imagination and emotion. Although he attempts by his distinction between real and notional assent to draw the boundary line between belief and thought and to secure a particular sphere for religious faith, he ends by diminishing the difference between the realms, because he wrongly supposes dogma to be the proper content of faith. Dogma, however, is the child of the marriage between the belief of the first Christian community and Greek thought; it is the product of both religious imagination and philosophic thought, and thus a kind of

The Religious Function of Imagination

hybrid offspring. We should not underestimate the value of dogma and dogmatic theology, but on the other hand we should not underestimate the religious function of imagination either.

The interest which religious imagination takes in philosophic speculation is justified by the fact that both aim at the same object in different ways. They are therefore natural rivals. To be sure, ultimate reality, ultimate meaning, ultimate truth are first of all philosophic concepts and problems, not topics of religious faith or imagination. Viewed as philosophic concepts, they do not figure in religion or even in religious theology. They are totally speculative. But at the same time they represent the ultimate limit of all speculation. Thought cannot think them out. All the types of the whole we know by rational experience are unfit to serve as models of the absolute whole we are seeking. Philosophers have spoken of a world soul or of a world mind. But these are conceptual images, products of the combined force of thought

Thought and Imagination

and imagination like the Christian dogmas, but without the background of the Christian religion, and therefore less competent and less legitimate. They pretend to be legitimate children of experience and thought, but the very concept of a soul contradicts the possibility of being enlarged to the whole, because the soul we know is always connected with a corporeal body; it is the soul of a living animal, and we are not allowed to suppose that the whole is an animal, as long as we do not abandon the realm of knowledge and thought and enter the realm of imagination.

The concept of a world spirit is as impossible as that of a world soul. It is an idea that contains many problems, but is not the solution of those problems. On the other hand this idea has not the virtue and the life of a religious image, but is supposed to be a product of thought only. As such it has only what content can be provided by thought. God, as the world spirit, is therefore conceived as a thinking spirit without any sense perception and imagination, without indi-

The Religious Function of Imagination

viduality and personality, like the God of Aristotle. Such a concept does not comprise the world in its full reality; such a God has no relation to the always individual and concrete world. He is no real world spirit. He is a logical God whose activity is thought alone and who thinks of himself in terms of philosophic categories. He is a philosopher God, but not the Lord of life, not the living God who reveals Himself in the Bible.

As long as terms like "the real" or "the whole" remain concepts, they cannot express what they mean, they cannot grasp what they claim to grasp. They represent problems that are doomed to remain problems, because the gap between the universal and the individual, between the general and the particular, or the gap between thought and reality can never be filled. Rational thought is condemned forever to dwell in the realm of universal or general concepts, in the realm of Ideas. Even the words "reality" or "individual" signify something which cannot be reached by thought. As far as thought pene-

Thought and Imagination

trates reality, it is the universal structure, the sphere of general categories only, that is seized. But this sphere is not reality. The very concept of reality hints at something beyond itself, at something that is not conceptual at all. We have to abandon the entire kingdom of thought and open the golden gate of imagination in order to overcome the difficulty.

Not until concepts have turned into images does the real appear to the human mind. It is the peculiar function and unique virtue of religious imagination to make *the real itself* enter the stage of our individual and personal life and address man. Religious imagination alone can perform the miracle of putting a living entity in the place of notions, endowing the philosophic world spirit with the qualities, emotions, motives, will, and purposes of a Supreme Being who turns to us, who can help and support, punish and frighten us, who can be our shield and our solace, and who on the other hand can rule over the world, thus solving the problem of how the universal can

The Religious Function of Imagination

become an individual, thought a personality, or, as the Gospel of St. John says, the Logos flesh.

The existence of God was the object of philosophical thought from the beginning of Greek theology. Many attempts have been made to prove the necessity for thinking of God as an existent being. The most famous of all these attempts is the so-called ontological proof proclaimed by Anselm of Canterbury. It is based on the supposition that the idea or the concept of God as the most perfect being necessarily includes the existence of God, for existence is a property of perfection. A being that does not exist is therefore not "the most perfect being." Kant has criticized this proof. No conceptual idea, he argues, includes the existence of its object. Thought alone cannot give the certainty that something really is; a certain intuition is necessary in order to gain this certainty, even when the object of the idea is the Supreme Being. The corresponding intuition of this idea, says Kant, is completely lacking. We

Thought and Imagination

have no experience of such a Being which could provide the rational idea with the adequate intuition. Therefore, Kant concludes, the idea of God, though necessary and unavoidable in the fabric of reason, is nevertheless an empty idea; it is, as he calls it, an ideal of pure reason, which cannot be verified as existing, and which therefore cannot be investigated and known as existing things and processes can.

I hold that Kant's refutation of the old ontological proof is not quite correct. If the idea of God as "the most perfect being" is necessary, then the existence of this being is necessary also, for the idea of a perfect but nonexisting being is indeed, as Anselm says, absurd. So far the proof is valid and successfully resists Kant's acute criticism. Nevertheless there is truth in Kant's rejection of the proof.

The monk Gaunilo objected to the ontological argument: according to the principle of the proof, the conclusion could be applied to the idea of a perfect island with as much

The Religious Function of Imagination

reason. Gaunilo is not completely wrong. Of course, there is a vast difference between the idea of the perfect being and that of the perfect island. An island is a thing physically limited whereas the perfect being is no physical thing at all but the possessor of spiritual qualities like intellect and will which are supposed to be perfect. But this supposition itself is questionable. So far as we are able to conceive of intellect and will, they are always imperfect and in the state of growing. It is true, we are striving after the ideal of a perfect intellect and will, but this ideal is no concept of an existing being; it indicates the direction of our endeavor and has therefore a practical value, but not the value of a theoretical knowledge. Kant is right in saying that the ideal is a mere idea without the corresponding content.

The idea of the perfect being contains an antinomy and is therefore an insoluble problem. The ontological proof issues from a problematic concept, therefore the conclusion is problematic also and not really conclusive.

Thought and Imagination

There is a gap between the concept and the real, between the idea and the existence of God. This gap cannot be bridged by thought alone, as the ontological argument suggests. The problem that is created by this gap requires an intellectual power other than thought for its solution; it demands some kind of intuition or experience of God. The ontological proof does not perform what it pretends to perform. It does not prove the existence of God as the divine Creator of the world. The idea of the perfect being needs an intuition to be integrated. Kant's criticism has discovered this need. But Kant has not seen that there is such an intuition, which is the source of an experience of God and which integrates the mere idea of the perfect being: *the intuition bestowed by religious imagination*. The *idea* of God must be replaced by the *image* of God to satisfy the demand suggested by pure reason or thought.

Now a new and difficult question arises: how can we be sure that religious imagination presents the true image? Theoretical experi-

The Religious Function of Imagination

ence has two criteria of truth: experiment and calculation. Both are lacking in the field of religious imaginative experience. Moreover, sense perception is in a way objective, religious imagination is not. On the other hand, theoretical experience is human only, whereas religious experience claims to be inspired by divine revelation. Is there any relation between revelation and religious imagination? This problem I will discuss in the second chapter.

II

IMAGINATION AND REVELATION

IN the Preface of his book about *First Principles* Origen says: "The contents of Scripture are the outward forms of certain mysteries and the images of divine things." There can be no doubt that the whole Bible from beginning to end is the work of religious imagination, although of course many historical facts and ethical rules are linked to the imaginative kernel. Was the Bible written by poets? Surely there is poetical imagination in the composition and language of almost all parts of the Holy Scripture, but as certainly no part of it was composed by a poet like Homer or Pindar. Robert Boyle and J. G. Herder have emphasized the poetical character of the Bible. But even Herder is far from asserting that the Bible has no other meaning and worth than a poem has. The similarity between poetry and religious documents like the Old and New Testament is confined to the literary form, the composi-

The Religious Function of Imagination

tion, the style, and so on; it does not concern the substance. Of course there is a kinship between poetry and religion: both are products of imagination. But poetical and religious imagination differ essentially in their intention, direction, and source. It is the peculiar task of religious imagination to express the divine mystery which is at the same time the mystery of the world and of man—the mystery of the real. Religious imagination therefore produces a kind of knowledge, and is in this respect more akin to science and philosophy than to poetry. The images of religious experience are supposed to reveal *truth*. The content of the Bible therefore is not imaginary but imaginative, whereas the content of poems is not only imaginative but also imaginary or fictitious. That is one of the reasons why Plato rejected the images of the gods as represented by Homer and other poets, although he himself on the other hand often used myths in order to illustrate doctrines which were more religious than philosophic.

As long as religious imagination appears as

Imagination and Revelation

a merely human power, like the intellect, its claim to express the divine mystery and to reveal the truth about the real cannot be comprehended and justified. But it is the peculiarity of religious imagination to be unlike the intellect. Imagination can perform its religious function only when man from whom imagination springs is included in the divine mystery, or, more precisely, when it is this mystery itself that works in man. Indeed, religious imagination is not less mysterious than its content or product. For the gap between man and the real is overcome in or through it. Only if this is true, is religious imagination more than a merely human power. The superiority of Biblical religion is based on the presumption that the divine mystery reveals itself in it, or that *man's* imagination is at the same time the word of *God*. Religious imagination thus turns into Divine Revelation from the side of God and into Inspiration from the side of man. Religious imagination in the sense of Biblical religion is *inspired imagination*.

The Religious Function of Imagination

To be able to image God the human mind must be inspired. That is why the Scripture calls God the Author not only of the world, not only of man, but especially of the Scripture itself. God interprets not only the world and man but also Himself and His interpretation. He interprets Himself not only as Creator but also as Interpreter. Religious imagination in general has the power to bring the Supreme Being before us as a living being like ourselves (or as a plurality of beings); and it has the special mission of *revealing* God as the interpreter of His world, addressing man, educating and teaching him. Ultimate truth cannot be found and expressed by thought, it can be revealed only by inspired imagination, and this imagination images ultimate truth as revealed by God. Inspired imagination thus appears to the mind of the prophet as the language of God. Revelation and inspiration are themselves images which hint at the mystery of religious experience and expression. Therefore they cannot be superseded by philosophic concepts. Philosophy touches

Imagination and Revelation

upon its boundary when it deals with these religious terms. It is the mystery of the religious image that makes revelation and inspiration possible.

Man interpreted by Biblical revelation is called "the image of God." Everything receives an imaginative character by being seen with the eyes of inspired religious imagination. Everything appears as related to the divine mystery, and therefore no longer existing merely for the practical use of man, or for theoretical contemplation, or for esthetic intuition. It is stamped as part of the creation, as expression of God's will or product of God's power, subject to His wrath, His love, and so on. The ultimate meaning of everybody and of everything is disclosed by the light of the revelation. Therefore everything and everybody cease to be what they were before this light illumined them. They themselves reveal now the divine mystery, they become tools or instruments of His revelation. In a certain sense they become *symbols*. But the term symbol does not precisely

The Religious Function of Imagination

fit the peculiar mode of Biblical revelation. A symbol is something that signifies something else. Thus the parables of Jesus have a symbolical sense which is suggested in the indirect form of the literal meaning. The direct or immediate content symbolizes the religious "thought" or "idea." Most of the parables symbolize the idea of the kingdom of God. But is this idea a symbol itself? Of course, it has a metaphorical meaning, but this meaning no longer symbolizes any other meaning or fact; it is therefore not a symbol, it is a religious image. The truth, expressed by the image of the kingdom of God, cannot be fully grasped by means of thought. Therefore the image is not a real symbol at all; it does not symbolize any concept; it "images" the mystery. Of course we could describe the content of the image "kingdom of God" in terms of thought. But whatever terms we chose, none would indicate precisely what is meant by this imaginative phrase, because the mystical meaning, which is the religious substance of the phrase, can never be rendered in intellec-

Imagination and Revelation

tual or conceptual terms of any kind. The religious image stands for itself, or for the thing it means. It is related to this "thing" in the same way the perception of a thing is related to the thing itself. Accordingly, God as He reveals Himself in the Bible is not a symbol, He does not symbolize the idea of absolute truth or ultimate reality; He "images" the mystery which is hidden in those ideas, or He is this mystery as expressed by religious imagination.

The phenomenal world thus becomes not symbolical but imaginative and that means *miraculous* or susceptible of miracles. The miracle is the peculiar way in which the divine mystery reveals itself in the midst of everyday life. Against the background of this life the appearance of the divine discloses unusual events which prove the presence of a power infinitely superior to nature and ourselves. Nature henceforth serves the purpose of revealing the truth imaged by God. The spirit and the hand of God shine through these events. They interpret the purposes and

The Religious Function of Imagination

the motives of His will. Thus they become as it were transparent. And they assume the character of miracles. They demonstrate the existence of a power which can perform what nature as nature, man as man, cannot perform. The world which is familiar to us in our daily life suddenly alters its character; the splendor and the majesty of ultimate truth and meaning light up all things and events, all beings and actions. Of course the usual senses cannot see this light, it is visible to religious imagination only. Thus the miracles are proofs of the existence of God—of that God Whose existence cannot be proved by rational means. They are the only adequate manifestations of His existence in the world of senses. To say that they run counter to the laws of nature is to misinterpret; for they happen on a level of meaning where the laws of nature have no place at all. Miracles can be verified or rejected by means of scientific thought as little as the laws of nature can be comprehended with the power of religious imagination; they occur and are meaningful

Imagination and Revelation

in a sphere quite different from that of science and thought.

The language of revelation, being the language of religious imagination, is therefore abundant in reports of miracles. Indeed, every event as related in the Bible has the nature of a miracle insofar as it reveals the spirit and the activity of God. The story of Creation, the narrative of Paradise and the Fall, as well as the whole account of the rise and destiny of the people of God, have the character of miracles. The image of God as a person willing and acting is in itself miraculous. The invisible enters the visible, the unknown and unknowable appear under historical circumstances. What other mental faculty can understand and appreciate this unheard-of event but religious imagination! Therefore scientific or pseudoscientific explanations of miraculous occurrences seem inadequate or misleading. They do not explain anything because they do not grasp what is meant in the miraculous tales. The old so-called allegorical interpretation is

The Religious Function of Imagination

often more adapted to its task and certainly more profound, because the same religious imagination which originally received and produced the content of the divine revelation is also at work in that kind of interpretation of it.

The Biblical miracle differs from all others in that the actual events are not transformed by the play of esthetic fantasy and put on the level of imaginative fiction, like the Greek myths, but God as a personal agent enters the world of historical and daily events, and these definite events are consistently referred to His agency. The Bible speaks of the world as illuminated by inspired imagination, and so conceives and positively grasps its inner reality and truth. *Biblical History* is therefore not history in the usual sense of the word. It is not deficient in objectivity, because it has another function and source than scientific objective truth. It intends to be related to our actual life. It is written from the stand-point of this life. History has the same function here that memory has in the life of the

Imagination and Revelation

individual. Memory is always connected with one's actual feelings and actual ideals, with the whole horizon of one's consciousness. Similarly Biblical history is not merely an account of what has happened in the past but of what is pertinent to the truth of life and to the destiny of man. For our life is ultimately to be interpreted by the believing spirit. Only this spirit can try to see our life from the standpoint of a supreme moral judge who accepts and rejects, condemns and receives into grace. Thus the Biblical myth contrasts with the fictions of poetical myth-building by being a vehicle of divine revelation. The figure of the Supreme Judge and the Supreme Teacher of the people of Israel in the Old Testament is accordingly both historical and miraculous. He has concrete relations with this historically concrete people and their historically concrete experiences and actions. He acts on the historic stage like other persons. And His people experience their own reality and the reality of all the historical events in the light of imaginative faith or

The Religious Function of Imagination

pious imagination. Experience and faith or imagination cannot be separated, because their experience is essentially imaginative as far as it is pious. Therefore their reality is determined for our own knowledge of them by this transcendental reference. The people of God are a miraculous people, as their God is miraculous, they are the chosen people, living in miracles and through miracles, the people of the *Biblical mythos*.

The imagination of the Biblical writers subserves the revelation of the morally omnipotent God and is the vehicle of that revelation. In Biblical history the mythos is not and cannot be differentiated from the actual history, and the history in its turn is not to be separated from the mythos. History becomes mythical because it is experienced in the spirit of pious imagination, instead of being the product of objective inquiry and scientific research. Biblical history is *mythological* because it narrates what God has done. At the same time Biblical mythos is *bistorical* because it narrates what the people of God have

Imagination and Revelation

done. Biblical history is mythological because it is the history of God's revelation addressed to His people. Revelation and religious imagination therefore complement each other. Of course, religious imagination is possible without revelation, as all mythological religions show; but revelation is not possible without religious imagination, as the mythological elements in Biblical history and in the Gospel show. Religious experience has therefore an inner inclination to the *mythos*. It sees history from the standpoint of the totality of human mind and that means from the standpoint which envisages the mystery of our life. It sees history from within, and the eyes of this view are necessarily those of imagination. Religious experience always goes that way. An English bishop wrote to me some weeks ago, speaking about the war: "It is not the political occurrences which trouble me most, far more important is the question, what God is doing to-day." God's action in all times is revealing. It reveals strata of history that cannot be discovered by

The Religious Function of Imagination

merely intellectual investigation because they concern the relation of all events and developments to the ultimate meaning of life and the world.

To the eyes of pious imagination political, social, military, and daily events have transparent windows on to their inner significance. But pious imagination is not able to accomplish the difficult task of interpreting those events without inspiration, and inspiration is not granted to every pious soul; it is reserved to the elect few who are called *prophets*. The prophet, like his kinsman in the realm of poetry, the genius, is both receptive and creative, passive and active at the same time. This peculiar duality is characteristic of the mystery of productive imagination in all its functions and fields. This duality has induced Kant to call productive imagination when operating in the field of theoretical objective knowledge "an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to dis-

Imagination and Revelation

cover, and to have open to our gaze."¹ The same, to an even higher degree, is true for the religious function of productive imagination, which Kant has failed to acknowledge as a legitimate source of religious life. The prophet is not only an empty vessel into which God pours His wisdom and advice, he is a kind of *coincidentia oppositorum*, a paradoxical phenomenon. For his imagination is his own: there are as many types of prophets as there are individuals inspired. Hosea is another man than Jeremiah, Amos is different from Isaiah, and these differences affect the style, the content, the morale, the temper of their prophetic speeches and utterances. Nevertheless, it is the same God Who speaks through them.

The prophet is always a mystic. He feels himself inspired by God, and therefore God's spirit is immanent in his own spirit. This mystical immanence characterizes the source of his prophetic production: his revelatory

1. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B. pp. 180 f.

The Religious Function of Imagination

imagination. Revelation does not completely disclose the mystery of God; therefore the mystical tone does not disappear with revelation; on the contrary it is stressed and emphasized. Revealed truth can never be satisfactorily translated into rational truth. The image of God as a *personality* is thoroughly mystical and cannot be fathomed by thought. Philosophy cannot understand, even less prove, that God is a person, or in what sense. Of course, it is obvious that ultimate reality cannot be conceived as something that stands lower than the level of selfhood and personality in the human sense. On the other hand it is quite impossible to think out the idea of a personality that is raised above all finite contingency, above all those cleavages between impulse and moral will, between sensation and intellect, between the universal and the individual, which belong to finite human personality and without which we have no intuition except religious imagination to fill the concept of personality. Thought alone cannot grasp how personality can rise above all the

Imagination and Revelation

limitations of finiteness and yet be not less but more. God's personality is like that of His missionary, the prophet, a mystical one. Mystical experience of God and the mystical self-experience of the prophet are closely connected, for the prophet experiences God in his own mystical imagination, and experiences himself as a man addressed by God and used by God as an instrument of God's revelation. God is in him and he is in God.².

Both in the historical and in the mystical or religious sense the Biblical revelation reaches its final term in the Gospel. Here the revelation is completed. Therefore the peculiar kind of images used by Jesus are of the utmost importance for understanding the connection between revelation and imagination. The center of those images is Jesus as the Son of God. God and man are mystically united in this name. The *unity of God and man* underlies the whole Bible: it is the theme of God's entire revelation. It is explicit in Genesis, where we read that God created man in His

✓ 2. Cf. St John 17.20 ff

The Religious Function of Imagination

own image, a statement that is at once repeated with a special emphasis: "In the image of God created He him." Moreover, the view * that God stands in a fatherly relation to man and particularly to the "children of Israel" pervades the entire Old Testament. Above all, the unity of God and man is shown in the fact that God's word is spoken through the mouth of Moses and the prophets in the form of a speech in the first person. This is "the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens and give ear, O earth: for the Lord has spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."³ It is true, the mystical unity of God and the prophet has certain limits. It is not an identity between God and man but an imaginative kinship between them, which cannot be described in terms of thought. Thanks to this kinship it is possible for man to speak in the name of God

3. *Isaiah 1.1 f.*

Imagination and Revelation

and for God to speak through man. This mystical kinship or likeness develops gradually in the course of revelation.

The prophet is not merely an instrument chosen at random, whom God uses merely as a speaking tube. He is elected in a special sense and degree from among the chosen people. Jeremiah says: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand. . . ."⁴ And God answers him: "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth."⁵ Jeremiah feels himself elected on account of his moral attitude and his emotional inclinations. God has chosen him because he is the man he is, and at the same time he is this man because God has chosen

. 4. Jeremiah 15.16 f.

5. Jeremiah 15.19.

The Religious Function of Imagination

him. The union of God and man cannot be brought about by the one-sided will of man. It rests upon God's gracious election. On the other hand, the favored man must justify his being favored by pursuing his mission with moral energy. He does not cease to be a free will when he becomes God's mouth. He is not a hypnotized medium or a somnambulist, he is fully aware of his moral responsibility and freedom. But in spite of this self-dependent personality he represents the personality of God when he speaks as God's mouth.

The dogmatic problem concerning the identity and nonidentity of God and Christ, the duality of two different persons and their unity, is foreshadowed by the mystical relation between God and the prophet. There remain two persons, only fused into one at the moment of speaking. The boundary lies where moral effort and willing, moral strength and virtue come to an end and inspired imagination begins. It is imagination which succeeds in unifying God and man. The prophet as such no longer acts as himself, and

Imagination and Revelation

in that measure acts un-freely, when he says what he is inspired to say, just as the poet is driven to poetry but cannot produce at will. Both prophet and poet act in a kind of ecstasy;⁶ both feel themselves inspired. But this un-freedom is not the un-freedom of unconscious natural processes. It is a synthesis of freedom and necessity (as it is a synthesis of activity and passivity), the highest freedom, which is one with necessity. Thus we speak of inspired poets. According to the Greeks, the god works in poetic creation; it is in fact Apollo who creates poetry in the soul of the genius. But in the Biblical view, which is governed by religious imagination as a means of divine revelation, only the prophetic afflatus, i.e., that which directly has to do with the reality of our moral life and with our moral weal and woe, is divine inspiration..

The prophetic unification of God and man attains in Jesus a new phase, the highest and

6 In this connection it is interesting to recall that Plotinus appealed to ecstasy when he realized that thought had reached its highest summit and touched upon a sphere beyond its limit.

The Religious Function of Imagination

final one. Throughout the Old Testament the image of God is concrete, real and personal, on account of the peculiar relation in which God stands to the chosen people. God is individual because He is the God of Israel. The Gospel is addressed to mankind at large. God does not indeed lose His relation to His people—Jesus springs from that people, on the human side, and he accomplishes and consummates what Moses and the Prophets have begun. But at the same time a new notion of the people of God arises among the circle of those around Jesus, who believe his preaching that he is the promised Messiah who fulfills all the hopes and visions of the Old Testament: the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And so the God of the Old Testament is transformed into the God Who reveals Himself in the mystical imagination of this single man Jesus.

The Old Testament prophet feels himself to be at once a son of the people and a mouth-piece of God. The two are inseparable, because God is the God of His people, who are

Imagination and Revelation

the people of the prophet likewise. The prophet is commissioned by God as the son of his people, he is called upon to address this people, to admonish, to educate, to lead them, although God is universal and the God of all men and all nations, among whom He has elected this one for His revelation. Now this bond between God and His people is to give place to the bond between God and Jesus. Jesus is no longer a prophet, i.e., a national missionary of God. He has to announce a new covenant between God and man without the mediation of a definite nation as chosen by God. He therefore can no longer perform his task as the son of his people, but as the "Son of man," and as such the immediate "Son of God." This peculiarity is the uniqueness of Jesus; through it he is the Christ. Jesus first and alone made possible a direct and immediate relationship between man and the Father in heaven, as interpreted by Jesus. God the interpreter appears in the figure of His son.

Revelatory imagination has reached its turning point. The relation between God and

The Religious Function of Imagination

man is changed for all time. God's mystery has become greater and nearer than ever before. It has become the mystery of every individual soul. The immediacy felt and announced by Jesus leapt over from Jesus to everybody who understood the new revelation.⁷ Jesus reformed and renewed religious imagination completely by his new image of God. Upon the immediate interpenetration of God and man as interpreted by Jesus rests the image of his Sonship and his own God-head. It is a striking paradox that the peculiar immediacy which Jesus felt in his relationship to God, from which his imagination and his words sprang, led to his mediation between God and man; that the Christian is enabled to live in *immediate* relationship to God through the *mediation* of Jesus the Christ. Jesus expresses this paradox in the words of St. John: ". . . and I say unto you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have

7. Romans 8:14. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

Imagination and Revelation

loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”⁸

God is revealed as “the Father” by Jesus, as his Father. The phrase and image “my Father in heaven” has revolutionized the world. The Old Testament sinks to the level of a prelude and preparation for the authentic revelation. The new experience, the new image of God is connected with Jesus only. All religious imagination after Jesus is stamped or influenced by this image, even in men who do not confess to be Christians. All feelings, all standards and patterns, all customs and habits, all ideals and institutions in all fields of practical life are altered by this image. It is impossible to escape the impression of this revelation, this revealing imagination. There is a secret law which governs the development of religious imagination from the Old to the New Testament. It cannot be formulated abstractly, it is not a general law. It is revealed in this individual, historical development which has nevertheless a universal,

8. St. John 16.26 f.

The Religious Function of Imagination

religious meaning. In the Old Testament God acts and speaks from a distance, and never to the individual alone but to His people. The prophet is only the representative of the people. In the Psalms the turning point seems to be near, but the individual still belongs to the children of Israel. "In Judah is God known, his name is great in Israel."⁹ God is still the "God of Jacob," and that means the God of the chosen people. "The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance."¹⁰ It is not until Jesus preaches that God speaks directly to the individual, to man as man. Jesus has discovered the individual and initiated a new era in history. The individual as discovered by Jesus is the child of God without being a child of a definite nation.

By the very act of uniting himself with the figure of this individual man Jesus, and so in a measure confining and individualizing himself over against the Old Testament-God,

9. Psalms 76.1.

10. Psalms 94.14.

Imagination and Revelation

God first comes to true and full universality. He puts on humanity at large. That is another paradox. *Universal* humanity is revealed in the *individual* Jesus, who is at the same time exalted above all individuality and humanity, and for that reason is not merely the man Jesus, but the Son of God, the Christ. The image "Son of God" therefore is the center of the new revelation. Jesus *is* the Son of God because he *knows* himself to be so; being and knowledge are here inseparable, because both are imaginative. Knowledge is here not theoretical or objective, but *imaginative knowledge*. Imagination determines being and knowledge as well, because the whole existence of Jesus the Christ is formed and constituted by his imagination, and can therefore be understood and appreciated and "assented" only with the assistance of imagination. Being *is* here based on the mystical self-consciousness of Jesus because it is mystical in itself. Therefore belief in the Sonship of Jesus must be based on mystical imagination also.

The Religious Function of Imagination

But if that is so, is not every kind of caprice and discretion possible? Is not the wanton product of everybody's imagination as justified to claim religious significance, is it not even as true, as that of Jesus? And then is not every subjective presumption or opinion allowed to compete with the Christian faith? Is there no objective criterion of truth and error in the field of religion? Are not imagination and imaginative knowledge the most dangerous and most uncertain bases of truth that can be found?

To such questions we have to answer: Yes, religious faith cannot be verified as scientific knowledge can! We are therefore more in danger of losing our faith than of losing the truth of our scientific results. Faith has a subjective foundation, a subjective element in itself, that cannot be eliminated or avoided, because it is the very source of religious life. This foundation, this element is religious imagination. But, we must add, life also is more uncertain and more risky than merely theoretical reflections or considerations. The

Imagination and Revelation

same responsibility which we have to bear in our decisions in life we must also take in our decisions on belief. There is no scientific verification of our choice between opposite ideals or moral judgments. The same serious, and under some circumstances, fatal consequences which follow our choices in life encumber our religious decisions. This seriousness indicates that the trend and direction of our religious imagination are related to an objective truth, that they are not entirely subjective. But this objectivity must be distinguished from scientific objectivity, because it is inseparably connected with the subjectivity of religious imagination. It is the peculiar and unique nature of ultimate truth to demand the collaboration of reason and imagination; the isolated intellect alone cannot find it. We have to spend the whole energy of all our mental powers to discover the right way in life and in belief as well. The totality of our existence is at stake, and thus the totality of our personality must participate in the search. Whether or not there is truth in reli-

The Religious Function of Imagination

gious images, whether or not they give the true light, this decision cannot be answered by means of theoretical inquiry or logical conclusion, but only by that kind of *responsible imagination* which embraces all mental powers of our total personality.¹¹

11. These statements aroused a debate when I delivered the lecture at Kenyon College, which occasions me to add some words. I do not deny that faith has *also* an objective truth I deny only that this objectivity is like that of scientific knowledge, which is based on sense perception (or sense intuition) and theoretical reason. The objectivity of religious truth is due to moral reason and to philosophic thought. But as little as practical decisions in life can be deduced from any ethical system, because life is always individual and concrete, as little or even less can religious truth be derived from any philosophic insight, because it is still less abstract and rational. I have called the element which is confounded with the abstract truth of moral and speculative reason "imaginative," because I hold that the concreteness of our spiritual life is represented by the trend and content of imagination. I do not know whether it is possible to explain how moral reason, speculation, and imagination together generate the religious image. It is I suppose inexplicable because it concerns the connection of our mind with the divine mystery.

To the further question whether or not it is possible to defend the truth of our own faith against other religious creeds, I should answer, it is, but not by means of thought alone. William E. Hocking in his book, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (New York, 1940), has given a fine example of a modern "apology" for the Christian faith combined with a fair attempt at an approach to a future "world faith."

Imagination and Revelation

Jesus is the son of God because in him God first becomes apprehensible as the loving Father of all mankind, or, shall we say, because Jesus is the transparent purveyor of this apprehension. His every individual act or word is an example, a testimony of the universal meaning of his mission and his whole being; in all he does and says this one central light shines through, appealing to our conscience and imagination, making his words parabolical and his acts miraculous, so that his whole person transparently lets through the truth which is embodied in him, which is He himself. The universal truth, become reality and personality by the revelation of Jesus, must show itself a mystery of different sort and scope from that which we have hitherto discussed. In the Old Testament, the community under God's immediate rule and leadership is represented by the chosen people, obliged to fight for the attainment and maintenance of its place among the nations, laden with all the finitudes and moral frailties of the human world. It is thus not a purely religious community, referring

The Religious Function of Imagination

to God only and living only in Him. And so for this community God is wrathful and punishing, threatening and rejecting, even while He brings help and salvation. He is the just God, the Lord in the kingdom of morally striving and failing men. True, the idea of redemptive love is already explicit in the Old Testament, but as a promise or a devout aspiration. Jesus brings the tidings of the fulfillment of these promises for those who follow him. Hence, there must be bound up with his proclamation the announcement of a new community, in which love reigns solely. This new kingdom takes the place of the people of God; in it, as the kingdom of heaven, the world, that is the ever-imperfect community of men, is overcome and transcended.

Because of the imaginative, i.e., mystical and mythical character of all truth of revelation, Jesus does not proclaim this new kingdom as an abstract ethical ideal apart from his own preparing and inaugurating work, but as a kingdom which shall soon come and forever conclude and sum up the world of

Imagination and Revelation

history. It is not important to know whether Jesus painted this coming of the kingdom in terms more or less of the senses. The very lack of any obvious pictorial description of details of the imaged eschaton and of the transition into eternity testifies to the truthfulness and simple sincerity of his human person, which felt itself to be a clear glass for the reflection of the truth which could and can only be apprehended by religious and not by poetical imagination.

The mystery of the kingdom of God worked upon the interpretation of the destiny of Jesus himself. His death upon the cross was an event in the world of human immorality, an event which drastically exposed the injustice of human ordinances, and one which necessarily entailed new experiences of religious imagination for those who believed that the kingdom of God was soon to come. Death, and above all the terrible death foreseen for himself by Jesus, necessarily led on the one hand to a transference of the center of gravity from the earthly world into the other

The Religious Function of Imagination

world, i.e., the world to which only the pious imagination of the believing heart might have access. On the other hand it led to a connection being made between the Crucified and the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ. Jesus could die, for he was a man, like to all other men in the flesh. But that which essentially and intrinsically distinguished him from all other men, and through which he was the Christ, the Redeemer, did not belong to his earthly and mortal nature. It was imaginative and mystical, and remained alive beyond death and the grave. It demanded, rather, that death, the grave, and continued life beyond should become matters of religious imagination or mystical apprehension, elements of a universally realized myth. Only in the form of this mystical and mythical revelation could the true meaning and import of Jesus the Christ be maintained beyond death. Thus, his death became, like his life, a window upon the truth of revelation. The transparency of the death transformed it into the transition point from the fleshly existence

Imagination and Revelation

of this earth into the suprasensuous life of heaven and eternity. And so the Resurrection was added by mystical imagination to the death as the most decisive event in the mythical history of Jesus.

The mystical and mythical form is the only possible, the only adequate form in which to express the truth of revelatory imagination, transported by the appearance of redeeming love into the midst of earthly human history, among men in their world of fallen morality. Any abstract formulation of this truth either would give us a *mythos* translated into conceptual (notional) terms and so divested of its imaginative significance (as gnosticism in all times has done), or else remain on the plane of generalized ideas and so renounce actual reality and life, which are the decisive properties of the mythical image. The Resurrection is not a mere symbol pointing to a metaphysical reality which is to be apprehended in philosophic speculation and thought; it is an inner reality which is to be experienced by religious imagination only,

The Religious Function of Imagination

like the miracles wrought by Jesus, or those narrated in the Old Testament concerning the passage of the Children of Israel through the Red Sea, or the rain of manna, and so on. In it, as in them, the mystery of God's eternal Being becomes real and actual as a power in our real and actual life, which is always, even to the most intellectual modern man, a life in imagination.

